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ABSTRACT

A needs assessment survey developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) addressed two issues: the perceptions of educators, students and the general public regarding the importance of certain educational goals, and the extent to which these goals are being met. Student knowledge and skill goals dealing with communication, decision making, problem solving, mathematics, and science and technology were rated highest by all groups. Preparation for Life Roles goals focusing on responsible citizenship, successful employment or post-secondary education, and for getting along with other people were generally rated highest. School District Enabling goals rated as most important included the provision of adequate staff, materials, and facilities; the provision of programs and services to meet individual needs; and the provision of an environment conducive to learning. With some exceptions, the general public rated the attainment of goals lower than the other groups. The discrepancy between the ratings of importance and attainment were quite large for all twenty goals. (Author/BW)

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Using Needs Assessment for Educational Planning: Procedures and Results of A Connecticut Survey

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In 1978 the Connecticut General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to develop a Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Elementary and Secondary Education. The Assembly's mandate specified that this plan was to be prepared with the advice of local boards of education, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It also specified that the plan was to include a policy statement of the Board's goals and objectives, an analysis of how the Board's programs and operations relate to such goals and objectives, and specific action plans and target dates for achieving these goals and objectives.

In response to this mandate, and under the direction of the Board, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) initiated a number of information gathering and planning activities. These included open meetings at various locations around the state, meetings and consultations with various state educational groups, reviews of planning efforts in other states, in-house conferences at CSDE, and a needs assessment survey. This paper presents information on the procedures, results, and impact of this needs assessment survey relating specifically to the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of educators, students and the general public regarding the importance of particular goals for education?

2. To what extent do educators, students, and the general public feel that these goals for education are being met?

3. Is there a discrepancy between the perceived importance of each goal and the extent to which the goal is being met? If so, is the discrepancy the same for educators, students, and tne general public?

4. Do educators and the general public differ in their perceptions of the importance of the goals for education?

5. Do educators and the general public differ in their perceptions of the extent to which the goals for education are being met?[1]

Procedures

Parameters for the survey were set by CSDE. As with most of the policy research done in education, the budget was modest and the time lines were tight. Given these constraints, a direct mail survey was deemed the only feasible approach to data collection.

Instrument Design

Two instruments were required for this survey: one to obtain information on the importance of certain educational goals and the extent to which they were being met, and the other to obtain these data as well as additional data on the importance of certain CSDE functions relating to these goals. As noted above, this paper focuses only on the data regarding the importance of the goals and the extent to which they were being met.

The first step in designing the survey questionnaire was to generate a comprehensive list of possible goal statements. This was accomplished by reviewing other surveys (Elam, 1978; Hoepfner, Bradley and Doherty, 1973) documents from other states, goal statements developed by local education

[1]Detailed survey findings relating to the relationship between the Board's programs and operations and these goals and objectives can be found in Archambault, F. X. and Gable, R. K. Final Report: A Survey of Needs for Connecticut Public Schools. Report presented to Connecticut State Department of Education, June 1979.

agencies in Connecticut, and goal statements which had been endorsed previously by the Connecticut State Board of Education. The resulting list was reviewed by professional and support staff at CSDE and by selected superintendents of schools, school business officers, and local board of education members.

The review process indicated that the final questionnaire should include between 75 and 100 items to adequately sample the goal areas which had been identified. Since an instrument of this length would most certainly be too burdensome for respondents, 22 statements were developed, each representing a broad area and each accompanied by several specific examples. This 22-item list was reviewed by administrators at CSDE and State Board of Education members. The final version of the instrument emerging from this review included 20 goal statements grouped into three broad areas: (1) Student Knowledge and Skills; (2) Preparation for Life Roles; and (3) School District Enabling Goals. Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of each of the 20 goal statements (very important, important, somewhat important, unimportant) and then to rate the success of Connecticut public schools in accomplishing each goal (excellent, good, fair, poor). Questionnaires were color-coded to distinguish among the different reporting groups. However, no identifying information was requested from the respondents. This condition was set by CSDE so that respondents could be assured of the anonymity of their responses.

Sampling

In conducting this study, several populations were surveyed in their entirety. These were: superintendents of schools, public school

principals, and local school board members. Membership in each of these groups was determined through lists maintained by CSDE.

Economic and time constraints necessitated surveying representative samples of the other populations considered in the assessment. Thus, samples were drawn from the following populations: twelfth grade students in Connecticut public schools in 1978-79; teachers in Connecticut public schools during 1978-79; and the general public, defined as all residents of the state. A brief description of the methods used in selecting these samples in presented below.[1]

Twelfth Grade Students. The total twelfth grade enrollment in October, 1978 was recorded as 38,674 students. A sampling procedure was developed which sampled each school in proportion to the school's share of the total enrollment. All schools were represented in the sample, with a minimum of one student and a maximum of 14 students being selected from any one school. The final sample of 811 students represented 2.1% of the twelfth graders in Connecticut public schools.

Public School Teachers. The total number of public school teachers full-time, part-time, certified and uncertified, was reported to be 39,925 in the fall of 1978. Procedures similar to those employed in selecting the student sample were used to select a teacher sample of 793. This yielded a total sample of 2.0% of all public school teachers.

Connecticut Residents. This sample was selected to represent the general public and to provide an opportunity to compare responses on the basis of community size. Consequently all communities were classified as: (1) Big Cities, with a population of 100,000 or more; (2) Fringe Cities, contiguous with big cities and with a population of

[1]More detailed information, including appropriate formulae and assumptions underlying the sampling procedures, are presented in Archambault and Gable (1979).

10,000 or more; (3) Medium Cities, with a population of 25,000-100,000 which are not fringe cities; or (4) Samll Places, all other communities.

The 1970 census reported 933,050 occupied housing units in Connecticut, in approximately equal proportions among the four community types. The necessary sample size for this population was determined to be 6,064 individuals. Cross-reference telephone directories were used to obtain individual mailing addresses for members of the sample.

In summary, then, the following nine groups were surveyed: (1) all superintendents, (2) all public school principals, (3) all board of education members, (4) a sample of all public school teachers, (5) a sample of all twelfth grade students, and samples of citizens living in (6) big cities, (7) fringe cities, (8) medium cities, and (9) small places.

Mailing and Follow-up Procedures

The general public sample of 6,064 citizens was mailed a questionnaire with a postage-paid return envelope. To increase cooperation this envelope bore the name of the Commissioner of Education. The packet of materials also contained a letter from the commissioner asking for cooperation and directions in Italian, Spanish, and Portugese for respondents to request translations. Eight days after the initial mailing a follow-up letter was sent requesting that the respondent either complete the original form or call CSDE for a second copy.[1] Given the time constraints and the size of the sample, this single letter was the only follow-up procedure employed.

[1]Of the 6,064 forms mailed, approximately 8% were returned as undeliverable. These were replaced using the original sampling procedures.

All superintendents, principals, board of education members, and members of the teacher sample were also mailed questionnaires. The mailing was followed by a letter similar to the general public letter. Again, only a single follow-up was possible.

The student sample questionnaires were sent to high school principals who distributed the forms to the students. Principals were given the names of the students in the sample and were asked to encourage them to return their questionnaires. Student questionnaires, as well as those for all other respondents, were returned directly to CSDE in postage-paid envelopes.

Return Rates

Table 1 presents the final return rates for each of the respondent

Table 1

Return Rates for Educator, Student, and General Public Groups

Group	Total Number Sent	Total Returned		Usable Questionnaires	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Educators					
Superintendents	165	115	70	115	70
Boards of Education	1500	480	32	480	32
Principals	1100	653	59	653	59
Teachers	793	354	45	354	45
Total Educators	3558	1602	51	1602	51
Students	811	185	23	178	22
General Public					
Large Cities	1504	230	15	226	15
Fringe Cities	1587	310	20	303	19
Medium Cities	1548	289	19	286	19
Small Places	1425	284	20	278	20
Total General Public	6064	1113	18	1093	18

groups. Examination of the table indicates that the rates for educators were the highest while those for the general public, especially from big cities, were the lowest. These return rates, particularly those for the general public, appear to limit confidence in generalizing survey results to the populations from which the samples were drawn. Possible reasons for such low response are discussed below.

Data Analysis

As noted earlier, survey data were obtained to answer questions dealing with the importance of certain educational goals, the extent to which they are being met, the discrepancy between the importance and the extent met, and the differences in perceptions of various respondent groups on both the importance of the goals and the success in meeting them. To determine the importance of the goals and the success in meeting them, mean ratings were calculated for each goal for each of the respondent groups. Means were calculated first for the "importance" ratings, and second for the "goals being met" ratings. These mean ratings were then ranked by respondent group within the three general categories of goals: Student Knowledge and Skills (Goals 1-6), Preparation for Life Roles (Goals 7-16), and School District Enabling goals (Goals 17-20).

Questions concerned with the discrepancies among groups' scores were addressed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures in combination with the Bonferroni Inequality. The first of these analyses was concerned with whether the discrepancy between respondents' ratings of the importance of each educational goal and their perceptions of the extent to which it was being met differed for the nine respondent groups. The discrepancy score for each individual was therefore calculated, and the means for the

various groups were compared using a one-way ANOVA. The alpha (probability) level below which discrepancies were considered significantly different across groups was set to .005; i.e., differences among the discrepancies were claimed if the probability of the observed differences arising purely by chance was less than .005. Although conservative, this level is appropriate considering the number of tests carried out. With 20 tests and alpha = .005, it can be stated that there is less than 10% chance of making the claim that one or more of the 20 goals show significant differences among the groups when such differences arise purely by chance. This follows from the Bonferroni Inequality.

Overall tests of significance among the groups' ratings of the importance of the twenty (20) goals and the extent to which they were being met were also made using ANOVA procedures. Again, the Bonferroni Inequality was used with alpha set at .005. Although data were available for respondents from various sized communities, specific contrasts were made using a combined general public group.

Results

The results of the needs assessment survey are presented in two parts. The first describes findings relating to the importance of the goals and the extent to which they are being met. The second describes discrepancies between the importance and success ratings of each group as well as differences in the importance and success ratings across all groups. Results for the three major goal areas will be presented separately in each of these parts.

Importance and Success

Table 2 presents means and ranks of the means for the importance ratings of the six Student Knowledge and Skills goals for each of the four groups of educators, the general public, and students. An examination of the table reveals that even though the means for each item vary across groups, the rankings of these are identical for each of the six groups. These results may be explained in part by the frame of reference of each of the groups; although the groups agree in general as to the relative importance of the goals, their perceptions of the absolute importance of each appear to be based on group-specific response tendencies.

All groups viewed communication skills in English as the most important Student Knowledge and Skills goal. Goals relating to decision making and problem solving and the development of mathematics skills were ranked second and third by all groups.

The mean ratings and corresponding rankings of the extent to which these same six goals are being met are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, there is less agreement among the groups on this issue than there is for the importance of the goals. A possible explanation is that the ratings of success in achieving goals may be affected more by professional responsibilities and local conditions relating to school performance than by group-specific response tendencies.

Regarding the goals themselves, it should be noted that the average ratings of goal attainment for each group across all six items are between fair and good. In general, all groups agree that increased emphasis in meeting Student Knowledge and Skill goals is required. Within this framwork, it appears that school districts in Connecticut are most successful in developing skills in mathematics and science. They are least successful

Table 2

Means and Rankings of Means for Various Respondent Groups

Importance of Goals for Education:
Student Knowledge and Skills

Goals	Respondent Groups					
	Citizens[1]	Superintendents	Local Board Members	Principals	Teachers	Students
1. Students will develop skills for decision-making and problem solving.	3.76(2)[2]	3.84(2)	3.77(2)	3.86(2)	3.85(2)	3.54(2)
2. Students will develop communication skills in English.	3.78(1)	3.93(1)	3.90(1)	3.92(1)	3.91(1)	3.61(1)
3. Students will acquire ability in another language besides English.	2.47(6)	2.34(6)	2.33(6)	2.28(6)	2.42(6)	2.48(6)
4. Students will acquire knowledge and understanding of science and technology.	3.19(4)	3.40(4)	3.24(4)	3.25(4)	3.27(4)	2.94(4)
5. Students will develop mastery of the skills and concepts of mathematics.	3.60(3)	3.83(3)	3.69(3)	3.81(3)	3.76(3)	3.37(3)
6. Students will develop a positive attitude toward the arts.	2.86(5)	3.14(5)	2.89(5)	3.05(5)	3.19(5)	2.72(5)

[1] Represents the simple average of responses of citizens from the four community sizes.

[2] The numbers within parentheses are the ranks of the means for each respondent group. Means can range from 1.00 to 4.00, where 1.00 is "unimportant" and 4.00 is "very important."

Table 3

Means and Rankings of Means for Various Respondent Groups

Extent to Which Goals Are Being Met:
Student Knowledge and Skills

Goals	Respondent Groups					
	Citizens[1]	Superintendents	Local Board Members	Principals	Teachers	Students
1. Students will develop skills for decision-making and problem solving.	2.19(4)[2]	2.49(4)	2.56(1)	2.56(3.5)	2.30(4)	2.48(4.5)
2. Students will develop communication skills in English.	2.15(5)	2.63(3)	2.25(4)	2.71(2)	2.39(3)	2.54(3)
3. Students will acquire ability in another language besides English.	2.07(6)	2.24(5)	2.13(6)	1.97(6)	2.02(6)	2.48(4.5)
4. Students will acquire knowledge and understanding of science and technology.	2.42(1)	2.72(2)	2.52(3)	2.56(3.5)	2.59(2)	2.69(2)
5. Students will develop mastery of the skills and concepts of mathematics.	2.38(2)	2.86(1)	2.55(2)	2.85(1)	2.66(1)	2.80(1)
6. Students will develop a positive attitude toward the arts.	2.23(3)	2.09(6)	2.17(5)	2.29(5)	2.15(5)	2.47(6)

[1] Represents the simple average of responses of citizens from the four community sizes.

[2] The numbers within parentheses are the ranks of the means for each respondent group. Means can range from 1.00 to 4.00, where 1.00 is a "poor" rating and 4.00 is an "excellent" rating.

in preparing students in languages other than English and in developing positive attitudes toward the arts. It should be noted that these latter two goals are also rated at least important by all groups.

Preparation for Life Roles. Mean ratings and rankings of the importance of the Preparation for Life Roles goals and the extent to which they are being met are presented in Tables 4 and 5 respectively. Examination of the tables indicates a pattern similar to that discussed above. There is a high degree of uniformity in the relative rankings of items for the "importance" ratings, but this uniformity is diminished for the rankings developed from the "goals being met" ratings.

Goals relating to responsible citizenship, getting along with other people, and successful employment or post-secondary education are rated as most important. Developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for rewarding use of leisure time was rated least important.

The highest rating for goals being met was for skills needed for successful employment or post-secondary education. The areas of coping with issues faced in a rapidly changing world and attitudes toward learning as a life-long process received the lowest overall ratings for goals being met.

School District Enabling Goals. Mean ratings and rankings of the importance of School District Enabling goals and the extent to which they are being met are presented in Tables 6 and 7. Again, there is considerable agreement among the groups as to the rankings of the importance of these four goals and less agreement as to ratings of the extent to which they are being met.

The goal rated most important by all groups is the one associated with staffing, materials, and facilities; the one rated least important

Table 4

Means and Rankings of Means for Various Respondent Groups

Importance of Goals for Education:
Preparation for Life Roles

Goals	Respondent Groups					
	Citizens[1]	Superintendents	Local Board Members	Principals	Teachers	Students
7. Students will acquire the knowledge and skills, and develop the values and attitudes, for responsible citizenship.	3.73(1)[2]	3.85(1)	3.77(1)	3.87(1)	3.82(1)	3.53(3)
8. Students will acquire the knowledge and develop the skills needed for successful employment or post-secondary education.	3.65(2)	3.59(3)	3.53(2)	3.68(3)	3.73(3)	3.56(2)
9. Students will develop an awareness of career opportunities and the requirements for entering specific occupations.	3.38(5.5)	3.17(9)	3.11(7)	3.29(8)	3.50(7)	3.51(4)
10. Students will develop the ability to cope with issues they must face in a rapidly changing world.	3.32(7.5)	3.33(7)	3.09(9)	3.36(7)	3.47(8)	3.40(6)
11. Students will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for rewarding use of leisure time.	2.76(10)	2.77(10)	2.49(10)	2.97(10)	3.05(10)	2.90(10)
12. Students will acquire knowledge and develop practices necessary for physical well-being.	3.38(5.5)	3.40(6)	3.18(6)	3.52(5)	3.54(5)	3.46(5)
13. Students will develop positive feelings of self-worth.	3.32(7.5)	3.46(5)	3.21(5)	3.58(4)	3.59(4)	3.30(8.5)
14. Students will develop an understanding of the relevance and application of the subject areas they are studying.	3.39(9)[2]	3.22(8)	3.10(8)	3.26(9)	3.33(9)	3.37(7)
15. Students will develop a positive attitude toward learning as a lifelong process.	3.45(4)	3.52(4)	3.40(4)	3.47(6)	3.52(6)	3.30(8.5)
16. Students will learn to respect and get along with people.	3.61(3)	3.62(2)	3.51(3)	3.77(2)	3.75(2)	3.69(1)

[1] Represents the simple average of responses of citizens from the four community sizes.

[2] The numbers within parentheses are the ranks of the means for each respondent group. Means can range from 1.00 to 4.00, where 1.00 is "unimportant" and 4.00 is "very important."

Table 5

Means and Rankings of Means for Various Respondent Groups

Extent to Which Goals Are Being Met:
Preparation for Life Roles

Goals	Respondent Groups					
	Citizens[1]	Superintendents	Local Board Members	Principals	Teachers	Students
7. Students will acquire the knowledge and skills, and develop the values and attitudes, for responsible citizenship.	2.16(2)[2]	2.38(4)	2.22(4)	2.43(1.5)	2.31(3)	2.49(5)
8. Students will acquire the knowledge and develop the skills needed for successful employment or post-secondary education.	2.31(3)	2.46(1)	2.42(2)	2.43(1.5)	2.36(2)	2.60(1)
9. Students will develop an awareness of career opportunities and the requirements for entering specific occupations.	2.19(4)	2.38(4)	2.21(5)	2.33(4)	2.22(5)	2.57(2)
10. Students will develop the ability to cope with issues they must face in a rapidly changing world.	2.08(7.5)	2.18(8)	2.07(9)	2.15(10)	1.96(10)	2.17(9)
11. Students will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for rewarding use of leisure time.	2.39(2)	2.45(2)	2.35(3)	2.32(5)	2.24(4)	2.50(4)
12. Students will acquire knowledge and develop practices necessary for physical well-being.	2.43(1)	2.38(4)	2.49(1)	2.42(3)	2.37(1)	2.36(6)
13. Students will develop positive feelings of self-worth.	2.08(7.5)	2.14(10)	2.09(8)	2.27(7)	2.14(7)	2.15(10)
14. Students will develop an understanding of the relevance and application of the subject areas they are studying.	2.17(5)[2]	2.23(7)	2.14(6)	2.28(6)	2.17(6)	2.54(2)
15. Students will develop a positive attitude toward learning as a lifelong process.	2.06(9)	2.16(9)	2.05(10)	2.25(8)	2.08(8)	2.30(8)
16. Students will learn to respect and get along with people.	2.01(10)	2.28(6)	2.11(7)	2.24(9)	2.07(9)	2.33(7)

[1] Represents the simple average of responses of citizens from the four community sizes.

[2] The numbers within parentheses are the ranks of the means for each respondent group. Means can range from 1.00 to 4.00, where 1.00 is a "poor" rating and 4.00 is an "excellent" rating.

Table 6

Means and Rankings of Means for Various Respondent Groups

Importance of Goals for Education:
School District Enabling Goals

Goals	Respondent Groups					
	Citizens[1]	Superintendents	Local Board Members	Principals	Teachers	Students
17. The school district will provide adequate staff, materials and facilities to meet the educational goals for each student.	3.57(1)[2]	3.76(1)	3.65(1)	3.87(1)	3.87(1)	3.65(1)
18. The school district will provide programs and services to meet the individual needs of students.	3.32(3)	3.57(2)	3.41(2)	3.65(3)	3.60(3)	3.46(2)
19. The school district will provide an environment conducive to learning.	3.48(2)	3.51(3)	3.40(3)	3.70(2)	3.67(2)	3.33(3)
20. The school district will provide opportunities for school administrators, teachers, parents, students and the general public to participate in activities and decisions affecting the educational goals.	3.06(4)	3.17(4)	3.10(4)	3.30(4)	3.32(4)	3.27(4)

[1] Represents the simple average of responses of citizens from the four community sizes.

[2] The numbers within parentheses are the ranks of the means for each respondent group. Means can range from 1.00 to 4.00, where 1.00 is "unimportant" and 4.00 is "very important."

Table 7

Means and Rankings of Means for Various Respondent Groups

Extent to Which Goals Are Being Met:
School District Enabling Goals

Goals	Respondent Groups					
	Citizens[1]	Superintendents	Local Board Members	Principals	Teachers	Students
17. The school district will provide adequate staff, materials and facilities to meet the educational goals for each student.	2.59(1)[2]	2.82(1.5)	2.94(1)	2.77(2)	2.57(2)	2.61(2)
18. The school district will provide programs and services to meet the individual needs of students.	2.41(2)	2.67(3)	2.62(3)	2.64(3)	2.60(1)	2.62(1)
19. The school district will provide an environment conducive to learning.	2.29(4)	2.82(1.5)	2.72(2)	2.82(1)	2.54(3)	2.36(3)
20. The school district will provide opportunities for school administrators, teachers, parents, students and the general public to participate in activities and decisions affecting the educational goals.	2.31(3)	2.46(4)	2.46(4)	2.56(4)	2.35(4)	2.45(4)

[1] Represents the simple average of responses of citizens from the four community sizes.

[2] The numbers within parentheses are the ranks of the means for each respondent group. Means can range from 1.00 to 4.00, where 1.00 is a "poor" rating and 4.00 is an "excellent" rating.

referred to the participation of various groups in decisions affecting educational goals. It should be noted that all goals were rated between important and very important.

Discrepancies and Group Comparisons

This section describes the discrepancies in the goal importance and accomplishment ratings across the various groups as well as differences in both of these ratings for each group taken separately. The data pertaining to the discrepancies can by partially viewed in Tables 2-7. Detailed statistical analyses supporting the conclusions reached here can be found in Archambault and Gable (1979).

Student Knowledge and Skills. Tests of differences among the groups in discrepancy ratings (i.e., discrepancies between the importance of goals and the extent to which they are being met) proved significant for all six goals. Moreover, these discrepancies are quite large for the decision making and problem solving, communication, and mathematics goals.

For all six goals the student group shows smaller discrepancies than all other groups. This apparently means that students are more content with their knowledge and skills than most adults feel they should be. The general public also feels that there is a greater discrepancy between the importance of goals and the degree to which they are being met than do superintendents and principals.

The results for the foreign language goal are also noteworthy in that big city respondents rate this goal as most important but are also most dissatisfied with the manner in which this goal is being met. It appears that this is due to the greater ethnic mixture in the big cities.

This inference is supported by the observation that the discrepancy for this goal decreases as the community-size groups "move away" from the big city.

Differences among group ratings of the importance of the goals were also analyzed, and significant differences were again found for each of the six goals. Despite these differences, and as noted earlier, the groups generally agree on the importance of instruction in the basic skills. It is especially interesting to note, however, that all educator groups saw the Student Knowledge and Skills goals as more important than did the general public. The one exception to this was the foreign language goal, in which the situation was reversed.

With regard to the various groups' ratings of how the goals are being met, there are also significant differences among the groups for all six goals. In this case the differences are more obvious than the differences in the importance of goals discussed above. As has been noted, students generally feel more satisfied with the achievement of the stated goals; however, their mean ratings remain within the same fair-to-good ranges as the other groups. For the most part the other groups are closer to fair than to good in their ratings of the six goals.

Preparation for Life Roles. Although the differences in discrepancies among the groups are statistically significant for all ten Preparation for Life Roles goals, there is little that is striking about these differences. Among students, there are smaller discrepancies between the importance of Preparation for Life Roles and the attainment of these goals, but this difference is not as readily apparent as it was with the Student Knowledge and Skills goals.

Significant differences exist among the groups in the importance ratings for all but one of the ten goals. Again, even though the differences are statistically significant, the ratings on these goals generally fall within the "important" to "very important" range for all groups. Although these ratings are high, they are not as high as those given to the basic skill goals.

With regard to differences among group ratings of the extent to which Preparation for Life Roles goals were being met, significant differences were found for all goals except physical health. There are no striking differences among the groups, but students again demonstrate apparently greater satisfaction with their preparation. The means generally range between fair and good, but closer to fair.

School District Enabling Goals

The discrepancies between the importance of School District Enabling goals and the extent to which they are being met are nearly identical for each of the groups. The most striking difference is found for the goal dealing with the provision of an environment conducive to learning. Educators and the general public, most especially big city populations, disagree strongly on the achievement of this particular goal, with the general public much less satisfied. Regarding differences among groups, school district goals are rated midway between "important" and "very important" by the students and the general public, with a slight dip in the "small places" group of the general public. There is an increase in the ratings by the superintendents, a slight decrease among school board members, and an increase to a high point for principals and teachers. Finally, the general public is less content than superintendents, board members, and principals, but roughly in agreement with teachers.

Summary and Conclusions

In response to a mandate from the Connecticut General Assembly, a Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Elementary and Secondary Education has been developed recently by the Connecticut State Department of Education. One of the many activities undertaken during the development of this plan was a needs assessment survey of all local board of education members in the state, all superintendents of schools, all elementary and secondary school teachers, a random sample of the general public selected to represent various community sizes within the state, and a random sample of high school seniors. The response rates for this mail survey, which ranged from 18% for the general public to 70% for superintendents, were much lower than had been anticipated. In fact, this was one of the most startling "findings" of the survey.

A number of reasons may be advances for the low rates. First, the survey questionnaire was rather long, and, according to some observers, somewhat confusing. As a result, some people may not have responded even though seriously concerned about education in Connecticut. Second, the follow-up procedures were less than ideal. Given the large number of respondents and the limited funds available, only one follow-up letter could be sent, and this did not include a second copy of the survey. It is possible, therefore, that a significant number of people simply forgot to respond. Third, in Connecticut as in other states, a large number of changes are being made in education, including changes resulting from federal legislation for mainstreaming the handicapped and state legislation for the equalization of educational and resources opportunities.

Given the publicity associated with these and a myriad of other changes, this survey and the Comprehensive Plan which it supported may have been viewed as just another in a long line of activities over which the public has no particular control. As a result, surveys may not have been completed because of the presumed futility of the exercise. Finally, it may be that respondents felt that they could have more effect on the process in other ways. This may be most applicable to professional educators who increasingly are voicing their concerns and opinions through unions and other lobbies, and to board of education members, who may perceive themselves as having more direct access than others to educational policy makers.

Due to the low-to-moderate rates of response, the results of this survey may be biased, and, consequently, confidence in the findings may be diminished. From a policy perspective, however, the findings are still valuable since they provide some of the best available evidence for the development of the Five-Year Comprehensive Plan. The following results appear to be particularly important in this regard:

- All nine respondent groups were strikingly similar in their judgements of the importance of the goals. Moreover, with very few exceptions, all group ratings were in the "important" to "very important" range.

- Student Knowledge and Skill goals dealing with the development of skills in communication, decision making and problem solving, mathematics, and science and technology were rated highest by all groups.

- Preparation for Life Roles goals focusing on the development of skills, knowledges and attitudes necessary for responsible citizenship, for successful employment or post-secondary education, and for getting along with other people were generally rated highes.

- School District Enabling Goals rated as most important included the provision of adequate staff, materials, and facilities, the provision of programs and services to meet individual needs, and the provision of an environment conducive to learning.

- Most of the ratings of the extent to which the twenty goals were met were in the "fair" to "good" range. Moreover, the average ratings for the various respondent groups consistently tended toward the "fair" end of the scale.

- With some exceptions, the general public tends to rate the attainment of goals lower than the other groups. Although there are some notable exceptions, the ratings of local board members parallel the ratings of the general public. Superintendents, principals and students are generally alike in their relatively higher ratings of attainment.

- Respondents from big cities emphasized acquiring ability in a foreign language more than all other groups, and were the least satisfied with the attainment of this goal. Their ratings of the science and technology goal was also lowest of all respondent groups, as was their perception of local school districts provisions of an environment conducive to learning.

- The discrepancy between the ratings of importance and attainment were quite large for all twenty goals. Students showed smaller discrepancies than all other groups. Moreover, they generally felt more content with their knowledge and skills than adults felt they should. Smallest discrepancies were found for superintendents and principals.

The findings summarized above confirm several of the results of the most recent Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools (Gallup, 1979). Particularly noteworthy are the importance of the basic skill subjects for both the Gallup national sample and the Connecticut sample, and the displeasure of the general public, particularly in big cities, with the success of schools in meeting educational goals. Contrary to the Gallup findings, however, younger adults were more positive toward the schools than were older adults. This may be due to the fact that younger adults in the Connecticut survey were high school

seniors whereas those in the Gallup sample were not necessarily enrolled in school. Despite the differences in data collection strategies, the inconsistent findings suggest that policy decisions at the state level should not be based solely on national or even regional data.

Since this needs assessment survey was commissioned as a policy study, the utility of the findings is best judged in terms of their impact on Connecticut educational policy. In this respect, the survey proved valuable for several reasons. First, it provided data for the development of statewide goals for education. In fact, four of the five goals finally developed were affected by the survey findings. Second, it provided information about state activities to help insure that these goals are met. Finally, it provided educators and the general public with an opportunity to actively participate in the shaping of educational policy. As is evident in the minimum competency testing movement currently sweeping the nation, public involvement in educational planning will be critically important in the years ahead. Needs assessment surveys such as described here may provide a real opportunity and vehicle for such involvement.

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